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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Note verbale dated 26 March 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has the honour to provide herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement submitted by the "Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe", a non-governmental organization in special consultative status (A/HRC/28/NGO/90), submitted to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-eighth session under agenda item 3 (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the present note verbale and the text attached thereto* as a document, of the twenty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 3.

* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.

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Annex

[English only]

With regard to Document A/HRC/28/NGO/90, we would like to underline the following: Law 4310/2014 isn't affecting either the teaching language, or the studies' programs or the schoolbooks. The upgrading of the teaching personnel of the minority program is the only and exclusive aim of this legislation, through a new hiring process that includes a competitive test, as it is the case for all Greek teachers since 1998.

Despite its dire economic situation, Greece spares no effort for the smooth operation of the minority education; just to mention that only in 2013 we have spent over 18 million Euros for the functioning of minority schools in Thrace. It goes without saying that the investment of respective amounts of money especially in this juncture requires reforms for the rationalization and their efficient use to the benefit of minority students.

We need to stress that the payroll of minority teachers has always been funded by the Greek budget and not by the minority itself, as it is the case in some other countries. Today, in Thrace 146 minority schools, 2 minority high schools and 2 Koranic schools are operating with the financial support of the Greek State, without which, it would have been highly unlikely for the minority to sustain their functioning.

Law 694/1977 fully protects the educational autonomy of minority schools in Thrace. The administrative changes that Law 4310/2014 brought aim at the removal of barriers in order for the teachers to be swiftly incorporated in the classroom. It is worth noting that the same organizations that now criticize the replacement of the Minority Education Coordinator by the Head of Office of Minority Education, they were complaining for the creation of the very same Coordinator post in the past.

Religious freedom and respect of the Islamic religion is secured not only in minority schools but also in public schools across Thrace, given that the teaching of the Quran is offered as an optional course to Muslim students attending public schools. The same NGO, that claims to be a representative one, has in the past strongly protested for this possibility offered to Muslim students. In this field again, Greece has paved the way without expecting any reciprocity.

Additionally, it is to be highlighted that Law 4310/2014 has been adopted after prior consultation with Minority Teachers' Associations and they have all been briefed accordingly. Moreover, the draft law has been put in public consultation, as it is of rule for every single legislative proposal. The Rodopi Teacher's Association has congratulated the Ministry for satisfying long standing demands of the teaching community. With the creation of the Post-Graduate Specialisation School for Minority Program, the Greek State offers teachers the opportunity to benefit from gratis vocational training on the teaching language of the minority schooling scheme.

Thus, the Greek State reserves to the teachers, who belong to the Muslim minority, a beneficial status; pursuant to the present amendment, Muslim teachers are entitled to positioning in whatever public schools across the country, while they reserve their exclusive right to teach within the minority program of the minority scheme. Pedagogically and scientifically-wise, an additional year of studies is sufficient for the Muslim teachers to acquire the necessary skills to instruct Muslim students - provided that the former's mother tongue is Turkish.

Finally, my Government considers that for a tangible reform forward in the field of education to make a difference, it should enhance the status of the teachers; this is why

Greece created two school counselor positions with special regard to the minority education scheme, as well as a special program for the vocational training and the skills' development of Muslim teachers.